1:Herskovits & Herskovits E-5 (1928-1929) 1934
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641 over whom it was exercised. When the ancestors of the
[567] Bush Negroes were brought to New World slavery, what measure of acquiescence they showed was due to the fact that slavery was not an unfamiliar tradition to them. They knew of the war captive, or the man convicted of a serious crime, who was a slave to one of their own kind. But the experience of the white man's slavery was a crucible in which the ownership of man by man, and the unquestioning obedience which men owed to those of higher rank, were destroyed, leaving only the ideal of the life of free men. "Free!" was the way in which one Bush Negro toasted
[273] another, or a white man, when he drank with him. A "*Man Nengere*," an adult Negro was, above all, a free man, and
621 it was as a freeman that he was governed, for though villages had chiefs, and there were bassias who were subordinate to chiefs, and though above the village chiefs were clan chiefs, and over them all the Granman, yet the final word rested with the members of each subsidiary body, and not with its leader.

624 Every village had its officials, and its medium for discus-
625 sions. Every clan had its head, and its old men, who,
[619] sounding out the will of the clan members, consulted with that head when questions were to be decided. For the decisions affecting the entire Saramacca River, there were
[643] the Granman and his krutu, before whom questions of
[692] larger policy or disputes between villages were brought.

Perhaps most impressive of all was the measure of auton-
632 omy which each village had. A village, or certainly a group
614 of neighboring villages belonging to the same clan, formed
609 a small kingdom. A Bush Negro of another village who came to visit, came as any stranger, paddle in hand, his top cloth covering his loin cloth. When he found himself in a strange village on a night when a dance was being given, he did not join the dancers until after much urging by a native of that village, and then he danced little, and if he were a particularly fine dancer, he took care not to flaunt his superior gifts. The exception to this, to be sure, were the sacred dances, when a stranger, whose god came

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to him when the drums called that god, could not be held accountable for what he did while his god had him in his control.

No stranger, no man who came to live in his wife's village, even though he had spent a good part of his life there, took it upon himself to offer advice to his wife's family. Again and again we would hear from men and women on the river, "In our village we do it this way," or, "We only carry the corpse on the head twice. Our spirits don't like to be troubled more often," or, "Mawu as a name for the Great God is used in our village, but not everywhere on the river."

There was the experience with several sacred images of village gods we had bought from an upper-river village. Our paddlers refused to carry them for us from the village to the boats, and it was with marked uneasiness that they permitted us to put them into the boats.

"We do not know what these gods can do. We do not know what is hateful to them. They are the gods of another people. We won't carry them."

But with the *gomi*—the child of the village of his mother's family, it was quite otherwise. He was a member of the village, he had a voice in its governing, he knew its gods. If he belonged to the family of the chief of the clan, if, let us say, his older brother were the chief, or if he was one of several nephews of a chief who had no surviving brothers, then at the death of the chief there would be a krutu, and the men of the village would decide which one of the several men who were eligible for the office was the most capable. Though rank was hereditary there was always selection among several heirs, and again the final word rested with the people of the clan. The offices of lesser chiefs—village chiefs who were subject to the clan chief, or bassias who served the chiefs—were passed on in the same manner.

While law making was in the hands of the chiefs, or captains, and the krutu over which they presided, law enforcement was the task of the bassias. It was they who saw to it that the orders of the chiefs were carried out. When

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625 some action was decided upon by the krutu, the several bassias were entrusted with its execution. Most villages
[562] had at least one woman bassia, and she was responsible to the village head for the behavior of the women. If food was to be gathered for a festival, if the village was to be cleaned for a special occasion like a visit to the village of strangers, it was she who saw that the work was done properly. If there were disputes between two women, it was she who carried the news to the village head, and she who transmitted his censure or decision, if the affair was not of sufficient gravity to warrant the calling together of the old men.

562 "Do the women talk in the big krutu?" we asked Bassia Anaisi, of the Granman's village.

"No, not in krutu. But they talk plenty at home."

623 The bassia, we learned, had other duties. He was not
624 only the messenger of his chief, he was also his official spokesman at krutu, and his intermediary in all matters of authority. If a council of the village was to be called, it was he who announced this to the men. When the men had gathered, it was not the chief who spoke, but the bassia who propounded the questions at issue. It was for this reason that Kasanya had leaned over and advised us to call for our town man.

623 Krutu, we learned, were of two types. Every village had its "*G'a Sembe*"—its council of the older men—who acted as an advisory body to the village captain, and the "*Lanti Krutu*," the meeting of all the men of the village. In this latter general assembly rested the final decisions.

Any important issue involving the village would be handled in two krutu, the g'a sembe krutu, and the lanti krutu. In this big lanti krutu where all the man were represented the bassia would speak the words of the chief and of the old men, and then the people would "go aside." This going aside was the concomitant of every consultation, no matter how informal the group or how unimportant the question which was being considered.

613 554 692 [642] /67 cont./

2) He exerts an extended judiciary power, for it is taken for granted that the legal and political power of the tribe cannot intervene in affairs between members of the same lineage, even murder, for it can be said that in the custom of the Refugee Blacks the lineage represents only one single life.

It is obligatory that the following be settled within the framework of the lineage:

[754] --Accusations of murder by sorcery where victim and supposed murderer are both members of the lineage;

[423] --Arguments over lands within the zones effectively [578] possessed by the lineage.

613 554 692 577 The way in which the captain exercises his functions as judge is hard to know, because for the Refugee Blacks it is extremely shameful to reveal the dissensions within one's own lineage. And as for those of other lineages, if one succeeds in becoming acquainted with them, one scarcely dares talk about it for if that came to be known you could smart for it.

613 466 554 Lineage heads have a certain authority on the material level; they designate the men charged with doing the work ordered by the administration, but truth to tell, it is above all a question of choosing from among volunteers, for it is profitable work. They might not succeed in imposing clearly unpopular orders.

613 554 624 The captain designates a certain number of supervisors or basia to help him. Their /68/ role consists in watching over the cleanliness of the village, in making all the material arrangements relative to dances and burials, in calling together those concerned to the meetings of the council.

613 591 The lo constitutes a unit from the spiritual point of view, but it is important to notice that it does not involve any collective organization on the material level. In this domain the wildest individualism reigns; there are no tools for collective use, and people get together to make their clearings only if they want to.

/68 cont./

613 624 [562] The basia are the mouthpieces of the captain, and not at all deputies having specific authority over a definite fraction of the village. There are three or four per village; in addition there are one or two women basia through whom the village head commands the work reserved for the women.

613 554 241 702 The head of the lineage possesses no religious powers over the land. The Refugee Blacks assume that the fertility of the soil depends exclusively on local divinities, to whom each one prays on his own behalf.

613 554 681 The captain, no more than the council, does not have the right to expel a member from the lineage, even for marked unworthiness. This is one of the most remarkable aspects of the legal conceptions of the Refugee Blacks, tied to the idea that a lineage represents only one single life. There again the thought of the Refugee Blacks can be regarded as the extreme opposite of the thought of the Bamiléké, with whom the head alone retains possession of the rights over the land, expulsion constituting the supreme social sanction.

881 Initiation; age classes; men's society. These African institutions seem totally unknown to the Refugee Blacks. No form of initiation of adolescents exists, and no ceremony marks collectively their [304] [852] [561] entrance into social life. Circumcision and excision are not practiced. For the children, boys and girls, there are two stages: that of the first garment, which is given upon the appearance of the pubic hair, at about 12-13 years, without ceremony, and the end of education which coincides with marriage.

561 The society of the Refugee Blacks rests however in large part on age hierarchy; strictly speaking there are no age classes involving a fixed organization, but they exist tacitly:

/279 cont./

539 He said: "What? You are at a loss for a little thing like a steamboat? That's a small matter for me. I shall find you that very quickly. Tomorrow, ask your father to give me a kernel of corn." The next day, Anansi arrived and said: "Then give me (the kernel of corn)." She took a whole ear of corn; he said: "I don't want the whole ear, but one single kernel; with that kernel I shall buy the steamboat." He jumped into his boat, he said: "I am going away." He paddled, going down the river, until he arrived at a village. The people shouted to him from the bank: "Uncle Anansi, come to land!" He said: "I can't come, I am carrying a letter from the king." That time Anansi was successful. The people said to him: "Come on, we shall put it in a safe place." He said: "Here I am already, why did you call me?" The people said: "Come with us, brother, we are hungry for you." He said (to the women): "Very well, sisters." They prepared the food. The people said: "Where is the king's letter?" He said: "It is that kernel of corn." They took it and put it in a safe place. He stayed awake until they were asleep, he opened softly, he went to take the kernel of corn. He went to the chicken coop, he threw it to the poultry who picked it up; corn and poultry do not go together.

He slept until morning. He said: "Bachia (1), please

• 624

1. Assistant head of the village.

give me the letter." The bachia went to get the kernel of corn. Nothing! He said: "Ho, ho, Anansi, we have lost it; we shall give you another." He said: "It is not another that I want, /280/ for I was passing on my way on the river, it was you who called me without any reason; give me a rooster. If you do not give me any rooster, we shall fight to the death in this village." They took a rooster and gave it to him.